

On Ash Wednesday, just 40 short days ago, we began our journey through the Lenten Season by being marked with a cross of ashes with the words “Turn away from sin and embrace the Gospel.” Ash Wednesday began a process in which we prepared ourselves for the joy of Easter with fasting, prayer, and the doing of good works. And now, as a church community, as a people of faith, the time has come for us to celebrate the joyful news that Jesus is alive in our midst.

When we look at the history of salvation, it is clear that our ways are not always God’s ways. We have a God who likes surprises. No matter what twists and turns life takes, God is always they’re waiting for us, loving us. The Easter story we just heard in our Gospel reading today is an example of a surprise that leads to a transformation. Mary Magdalene got up early that Sunday morning after the crucifixion expecting to find the cold and lifeless body of Jesus. She wanted to sit and mourn, to try to make sense of all the horror and loss she and her friends had just experienced with Jesus. Instead, she found an empty tomb.

Today's Gospel passage stops there, but the story continues. Mary stayed at the tomb after Peter and John left, confused and most likely angry. Things hadn’t turned out how she had expected. It wasn’t until Jesus called her by name that she recognized him, that she realized that he was alive, that he had risen from the dead. At that point, she is transformed, her eyes are opened and Jesus gives her a mission: Go and tell the others! So Mary went and announced to the disciples what she had seen and heard. Mary becomes the first to see the Risen Lord and to proclaim the Resurrection to the world.

In our own lives, living the resurrection involves being open to the actions of God in our lives. It involves being open to the world of possibilities rather than being trapped in our own self-imposed limitations. We have a God full of surprises and great things can unfold in our lives when we let go and trust. Life rarely unfolds the way we think it should. Some times events occur which are outside of

our control and we have to respond, we have to shift our perspective and open our eyes to new possibilities. No matter what twists and turns life takes, we can't lose sight of the fact that God journeys along with us. Whether we take the scenic route or the highway, God is there with us, and the resurrection gives us hope to continue the journey, to spread the good news that Jesus is alive.

Mary Magdalene models for us what following Jesus means. She first encountered Jesus in the ordinary events of life and was transformed. In that transformation, she became a disciple and followed Jesus all the way to the cross. She didn't run in fear like the others, she stood by the cross with his mother and sat by tomb, and when all hope was lost, she stayed faithful and experienced the ultimate joy of the resurrection. When her sorrow was turned to joy, she proclaimed the good news.

In our baptism we too are all called to not only believe our faith, but also to spread the Good News. We are baptized priest, prophet, and king and in our baptism we are given the call to lead others to God through prayer, by example, and with healing and loving hands offered in service. How we love others, how we treat others is how we love and treat our Risen Lord.

Today is a day of great joy. We encounter the Risen Lord in both word and sacrament. We gather together as church, as the living body of Christ, to celebrate the joy of the resurrection, to be fed at this table, to be nourished so that we can go out and live our faith in the ordinary events of life. St. Augustine said, "we are an Easter people and 'Alleluia' is our song." Let us go forth from here today alive in God's love so that we can live the resurrection in both word and deed and proclaim God's wondrous deeds.